

Wednesday, 9 March, 2011

Flood of lights



ISLAMABAD: Civil society activists are lighting up lanterns before rallying in front of National Press Club to mark 100th year of International Women's Day. SHABBIR HUSSAIN



ISLAMABAD: Activists of Women Councilors Network hold a rally from Jinnah Avenue to Parliament House, to mark the International Women's Day. APP

100th year of International Women's Day

Standing up to extremism, discrimination

By Mahtab Bashir

ISLAMABAD: Members of civil society on Tuesday gathered in front of parliament house and staged a protest rally with the demand of immediate passage of 'Domestic Violence Bill' pending in the parliament. They also demanded government to devise a comprehensive strategy to end rising religious extremism in the country.

In order to celebrate the 100th International Women's Day, civil society organizations members, NGOs, women's rights activists and peoples from different walks of life held a rally under the platform of Insani Haqooq Ittehad (IHI), from Kalsoom Plaza to Parade Avenue - in front of Parliament House.

Women's rights activists and IHI members, Rehana Hashmi, Dr Farzana Bari, Naushaba Arif and Rabia Aslam delivered speeches on the occasion to highlight the significance of IWD and rights of women. Wasim Wagha, coordinator IHI, highlighting the theme of the event said today is not a day to protest but a day to celebrate - to celebrate women's status as an equal and concerned citizen and not a mere marginalized and discriminated gender.

The participants were carrying 'Dove of Peace', which were prepared by the school children and teachers

of Khuldunia High School. They were putting badges with digits '83100' which meant '100th 8th March - International Women's Day.

They raised slogans '*Kesa chahiay Pakistan - Brabar hon jahan sab insan*', '*Hum sab ka ek he naara - Aman hey haq hamara*', '*Yeh dehshatgardi, yeh mullahgardi, Nahen chali ge*', '*Hum aman phelany nikley hein - Aao hamarey saath chalo; Ham mulk bachaney nickley haien - Aao hamarey saath chalo*' etc.

Women's Charter of Demand which they presented at the event was a significant expression of this fact - that all the demand made in the charter were in fact socio-economic, political issues which the peoples of Pakistan are suffering from, including the religious intolerance, sectarian violence. The charter demanded separating religion from state functions, gender equality, balance between administration and justice systems, freedom for press, cultural and educational institutions, provincial autonomy, agricultural reforms, banning weapons, and keeping the peaceful borders.

Ms Naushaba Arif, while appreciating the present government for women friendly policies, strongly demanded that the 'Domestic Violence Bill' which pending in the parliament shall immediately be passed and made a law. Dr Farzana Bari demanded the

government to take steps to end religion extremism which is affecting the cause of women's rights. Arifa Mazhar read famous poem 'mein adhuri'; Nazia Taj also read poems on women's rights.

Rabeeha Hadi from Aurat Foundation (AF) read women's Charter of Demand as prepared by the members of Insani Haqooq Ittehad, women's rights activist and member National Commission was the key in shaping the charter of demand.

Pattan's theatre group 'Lok Nattak' presented theatre performance on the issue being faced by the women flood affectees. The women activists also sung women's anthem titled 'Darya ki qasam, maujoon ki qasam - yeh tana bana badley ga'.

Earlier, Sufi singer Areeb Azhar and his group enthralled the participants with their music and songs on women's rights. The participants, later in the evening held 'Mashal Bardar Walk' at Super market (F.6).

To mark the International Women Day, Lok Sanjh Foundation (LSF) in collaboration with Lok Virsa organised a rural women conference here on Tuesday at Lok Virsa. Hundreds of women from rural areas of the country participated in the conference urged the government to take practical steps to empower them by providing basic facilities.